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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R.I.**

**JOINT LOGISTICS IN AFGHANISTAN: SEABASED, FOCUSED, OR MIRACLE?**

by:

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A paper submitted to the facility of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College of the Department of the Navy.

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03 February 2003

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## Introduction

*Logistics determines the operational reach of combat forces – the distance over which military power can be concentrated and employed decisively. In general it can be extended by establishing new bases and deploying one's forces into forward areas, increasing the effective range of weapon systems, extending the operational range and endurance of combat and combat support forces, improving the effectiveness of lines of communication, and improving the transportation network.<sup>1</sup>*

*M.N. Vego  
US Naval War College*

Fresh in America's memory is the dramatic operations conducted by the 15<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (15<sup>th</sup> MEU) in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan. This was the first attempt to apply the new standards and doctrine that the Navy and Marine Corps had started developing in 1992 with the release of From the Sea.<sup>2</sup> This operation stretched that doctrine as Marine forces conducted missions several hundred miles inland and had seabased logistics as their basis of sustainment in an immature theater. However, a strong joint logistics system and forward logistics bases must be employed to ensure that sustainment will be available for all forces in a sustained operation in the Joint Operations Area (JOA).

As operation tempo continues to increase, commanders must be able to expect that Navy and Marine forces have the ability to insert forces into a country several hundred miles inland and support themselves, at least initially, with seabased logistics. This is now considered the standard that all Navy and Marine forces can bring to the commander. However, the mission will not be executed in isolation from other services operating in the area. In fact, the MEU's mission in Afghanistan would not have had the same success without their support.

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<sup>1</sup> Milan Vego, Operational Warfare (Newport, RI: Naval War College 2000), 261-262.

<sup>2</sup> Department of the Navy, From the Sea, (Washington DC: 1992).

How can Joint Task Force (JTF) commanders use forces available to him if he has a misconception about their capabilities? The 15<sup>th</sup> MEU was tasked with a very difficult mission to accomplish in support of OEF. They implemented previously untested doctrinal concepts that were hailed by the Marine Corps as the reason for mission success. The operation was successful however; the MEU's seabased logistics was only a part of the reason for the success at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Rhino. The true success was in the mixing of Navy logistics doctrine with Marine Corps seabased logistics doctrine. This, coupled with assistance from the Air Forces' logistics capabilities, brought about the longest-range amphibious raid that has been accomplished to date.

Throughout this paper we will examine the airfield seizure conducted by the 15th MEU in support of OEF and decipher what made it logistically successful and what can be done to ensure that future operations will have that same success. We will compare this operation to the current doctrine of both Joint Forces and the Marine Corps to see how the doctrine impacted logistics in support of this mission. Lastly, we will try to draw logistical lessons learned to help improve logistics for a JTF commander that may be tasked with a similar mission in the future.

## Doctrine

In order to understand the comparison that we will examine, we must first explore the current doctrines that the Navy, Marine Corps, and Joint Services have published.

### Marine Corps Doctrine

*To influence events overseas, America requires a credible, forwardly deployable, power projection capability. In absence of an adjacent land base, a sustainable forcible entry capability that is independent of forward staging bases, friendly borders, overflight rights, and other politically dependent support can only come from the sea.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Warfighting Concepts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Quantico, VA: n.d.), I-4.

## *USMC Warfighting Concepts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

In 1992 the Department of Navy, in order to ensure its relevancy, produced a White Paper entitled From the Sea. This paper tried to forecast where and how the next generation of battles would be fought. The conclusion was that these battles would be fought in the littorals against non-regular forces.<sup>4</sup> The publication, From the Sea, was soon followed by Forward From the Sea. This new White Paper expanded and updated the original strategic concepts put forth in From the Sea.<sup>5</sup> The Marine Corps incorporated these two White Papers into operational doctrine with the concept of Operational Maneuver from the Sea (OMFTS). This doctrine used the seas as maneuver space and placed several control measures normally located on the ground at sea. Now a force could have an assembly area, attack position, and line of departure all in the maneuver space at sea, thereby allowing the maximum use of force protection and flexibility for the commander.<sup>6</sup> The last tactical doctrine that the Marine Corps produced was Ship to Objective Maneuver (STOM) in which the forces bypass all geographic locations and attack directly onto the objective.<sup>7</sup> This concept challenged logistics that had been tested and proven over many major conflicts, the steel mountain on the beach. No longer would forces fight their way ashore, gain a foothold and wait until the logistic support could be moved ashore allowing the combat forces to break out of the beach head and onto their true objective elsewhere. This new concept calls for a reduced footprint ashore. Logistical forces would remain on the ship and support combat forces directly from the sea. This would free the commanders' combat forces from security missions and reduce the amount of logistics that would be required ashore. The Marine Corps had now developed the

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<sup>4</sup> Department of the Navy, From the Sea, (Washington DC: 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Department of the Navy, Forward From the Sea, (Washington DC: n.d.), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Warfighting Concepts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, (Quantico, VA: n.d.), I-3 – I-22.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., II-3 – II-23.

concept of seabased logistics.<sup>8</sup> This theory addressed how a unit could best support STOM. We will review and discuss the tenets that are provided in this concept.

#### Joint Forces Doctrine

*The nature of modern warfare demands that we fight as a joint team. This was important yesterday, it is essential today, and it will be even more imperative tomorrow.*<sup>9</sup>

*General John M. Shalikashvili*

Additionally, during this time frame the Joint Forces published Joint Vision 2010. This document was followed by Joint Vision 2020.<sup>10</sup> These visions encompassed four operational concepts: dominant maneuver, precision engagement, full dimensional protection, and focused logistics. In this paper we will only be comparing the tenets of focused logistics and how it can shape the JOA for the JTF commander.

Above is a thumbnail sketch of the paradigm the Marine Corps and Joint Forces have produced to prepare for future battles. The Marine Corps' operational concept was proven by the successful operations conducted by the 15<sup>th</sup> MEU in Afghanistan. But did the 15<sup>th</sup> MEU prove that seabased logistics can support sustained operations 400-miles inland or were there other factors that contributed to the mission's success? We will look at the operation and then compare the mission to the tenets of seabased logistics and focused logistics. First let us briefly review the mission parameters for the seizure of FOB Rhino.

#### Forward Operating Base Rhino

*Marines of Task Force 58 (TF 58) conducted a 400-mile ship-to-objective operation into "landlocked" Afghanistan using today's technology. Seabasing is about maneuver and options. It is about the expeditionary*

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<sup>8</sup> Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Warfighting Concepts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, (Quantico, VA: n.d.) XI-3 – XI-14.

<sup>9</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Logistic Support of Joint Operations, Joint Pub 4-0 (Washington, DC: 6 April 2000), D-1.

<sup>10</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Logistic Support of Joint Operations, Joint Pub 4-0 (Washington, DC: 6 April 2000), D-1.

*ethos, imagination, and boldness the Marines of TF 58 demonstrated and is at the very cornerstone of naval transformation and naval forces' contribution to the future joint fight.<sup>11</sup>*

*Colonel Vincent J. Goulding  
Marine Corps Gazette, September 2002*

The mission called for the seizure of a dirt airfield four hundred miles inland in the southern region of Afghanistan. The size of the objective and the “be prepared to” missions of this operation called for a force of approximately 1400 Marines and Sailors. The logistical requirements were daunting as the MEU forecasted the number of Marines and all the equipment that would be needed in order to sustain the force for months while conducting missions. First, the MEU did not have the required lift to move the heavier equipment to the objective with their organic helicopters or C-130's. The MEU needed C-17's from the Air Force, which would require a fixed airfield. Additionally, all supplies necessary to sustain this force, fuel, water, food, and ammunition, would have to fly into FOB Rhino aboard fixed wing aircraft. Unforeseen by the MEU during the planning stage was the requirement to support the coalition forces and Special Operation Forces (SOF) that were also using FOB Rhino thus adding additional sustainment to an already strained system.<sup>12</sup>

As the MEU planned the logistics for this mission, it became apparent that seabased logistics would not be sufficient to support the force closure or troop sustainment for that amount of time with only MEU assets. The MEU began to search the other services and what available capabilities they possessed. No service had any assets in Afghanistan but all were establishing bases with airfields in close proximity within the neighboring countries. The MEU planned for a hub and spoke type replenishment system, similar to what the Navy uses to support

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<sup>11</sup> Colonel Vincent J. Goulding, “Marine Corps Warfighting Lab Looks at Seabasing”, Marine Corps Gazette, (September 2002): 80.

<sup>12</sup> Major Mikel E. Stroud, 15<sup>th</sup> MEU S-4, Personal account of the operation: 30 January 2003.



their ships afloat (See Figure 1). Seven locations had the proper requirements for use as an Intermediate Staging Base (ISB) and the MEU sent liaison teams to each for the movement coordination of essential sustainment.<sup>13</sup> This system also enabled the reach-back capability from Camp Pendleton to have an airfield to deliver crucial items to MEU Marines who were responsible for the timely transload and delivery of the items to FOB Rhino. This was the rough outline of what the 15<sup>th</sup> MEU's requirements were and how they planned to support this mission.

### Comparison of the Mission

First we compare the tenets of seabased logistics, from the Warfighting Concepts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and examine which tenets the MEU upheld as they planned the support for this mission. Next we will review and compare focused logistics, from the Doctrine for Logistics Support of Joint Operations JP 4-0, against the mission to ascertain whether or not the MEU followed its tenets. Finally, we will discuss the differences between how the MEU supported this mission and what could have been done doctrinally to ensure better support for the forces.

### The Tenets of Seabased Logistics

*Maritime forward presence is a key to developing future Navy and Marine Corps operating force structure, and Seabased Logistics will be a principle underwriter of the tangible credibility necessary for the CINCs to view the Navy-Marine Corps team as the 21<sup>st</sup> Century force of choice.<sup>14</sup>*

### *USMC Warfighting Concepts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

The first tenet is primacy of the seabase.<sup>15</sup> This is the employment of a floating distribution center. This includes limited footprint ashore, which reduces the amount of logistics needed and the forces to protect it. This tenet also requires the use of aerial delivery of tailored sustainment packages for the forces ashore. During the FOB Rhino seizure, the MEU moved logistics ashore

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Warfighting Concepts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, (Quantico, VA: n.d.) XI-14.

to the FOB and ISB's thus having a large footprint of supplies and personnel. This was needed to ensure that the combat forces would have the support they required. Time, distance, and amount of forces all precluded the MEU from maintaining the primacy of the seabase and necessitated the employment of ISB's.

The second tenet is reduced logistics demand.<sup>16</sup> This tenet is making the best use of commercial equipment and technology and is the concern of the service Headquarters, therefore beyond what the MEU could control as they planned for this mission. One example of how the Marine Corps is trying to reduce the logistics demand are the use of alternate power sources, thereby reducing battery demand. Another is the use of the precision ordinance, which reduces the logistics demand as the Corps aims for one shot, one kill mentality. Because of the isolated objective, the MEU would not be able to tap into any Host Nation (HN) support or local infrastructure. All support was going to have to come from the MEU sebased sustainment and the use of ISB's in the area.<sup>17</sup>

The third tenet is that of in-stride sustainment.<sup>18</sup> This is the ability, through computer automation, to manage all requisitions and distribution. This tenet allows for "logistics pull" vis "logistics push" which had been the previous goal of Marine Corps logistics. Units would only receive what was essential and not maintain large stockpiles of supplies for possible future needs. In the FOB, the connectivity arrived with the MEU command element and logistics was immediately able to communicate via SIPER net and SATCOM radio to all of the ISB's where the MEU had placed their liaison officers. This allowed the MEU to use "pull logistics" as they requested sustainment for the FOB. A subset of this tenet is in-transit visibility; the MEU was

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., XI-5.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., XI-6.

<sup>17</sup> Major Mikel E. Stroud, 15<sup>th</sup> MEU S-4, Personal account of the operation, 30 January 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Warfighting Concepts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, (Quantico, VA: n.d.), XI-7.

not able to accomplish this. This technology deficiency was overcome by tracking sustainment to and from each ISB where the MEU had liaison officers.<sup>19</sup> However, if while in-transit the aircraft had to redirect to a different airfield, it could take several hours to several days before the MEU could regain visibility of that sustainment. Currently, the Marine Corps does not have the software to provide this visibility on all sustainment shipments so units use port to port tracking via SIPER net and SATCOM. The MEU had a high success rate using this method as they tracked essential sustainment into FOB Rhino.

The next tenet is adaptive response and joint operations.<sup>20</sup> This establishes seabased logistics as part of the theater logistics effort and maintains flexibility for forces afloat to respond to any mission. This was accomplished by the MEU in this operation. The MEU exercised extreme flexibility and wise use of liaison officers to create their own joint logistics effort that employed all the bases in the Joint Operating Area (JOA) (See Figure 2). The MEU was able to accomplish this by establishing a hub and spoke system that was mentioned earlier. The MEU astutely took advantage of bases operated by the other services in the area to provide the fastest, most flexible logistics for the forces ashore. This system included the Air Force base in Jacobabad, the SOF base in Oman, the Navy bases in UAE and Bahrain, along with bases the MEU established in Pasni and on the seabase itself in order to ensure sustainment for its forces.

The last tenet of seabased logistics is force closure and reconstitution.<sup>21</sup> Force closure was fast but this could not have occurred without the collaboration of the Air Force. The help needed was two fold. First the amount of troops and equipment needed made it necessary to pre-stage prior to the seizure. The Air Force at Jacobabad was able to provide that pre-stage base in

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<sup>19</sup> Major Mikel E. Stroud, 15<sup>th</sup> MEU S-4, Personal account of the operation, 30 January 2002.

<sup>20</sup> Marine Corps Command Development Command, Warfighting Concepts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, (Quantico, VA: n.d.), XI-8.

<sup>21</sup> Marine Corps Command Development Command, Warfighting Concepts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, (Quantico, VA: n.d.), XI-9.

conjunction with the MEU Marines at the airfield in Pasni. This would shorten the legs the aircraft flew and allow the MEU to introduce forces quickly to FOB Rhino. Secondly, the MEU was able to utilize the Air Forces' C-17's in theater. This aircraft would allow the MEU to transport heavier equipment that was needed for this battle; i.e. LAV's, 5-ton trucks, LVS trucks, airfield fire-fighting equipment, as well as some mass sustainment. These items would not have arrived at the objective as quickly without the C-17's and without costing the MEU precious sustainment airlift from organic C-130's. The last part of this tenet is reconstitution at sea. The FOB Rhino mission was not able to reconstitute at sea and would require the use of C-17's again to fly most of the equipment and supplies to a wash-down and back-load site outside the JOA. The amphibious ships have little space available for Marines to conduct agriculture wash-downs and for the break down of pallets and mobile loads to preform maintenance and ensure wash-down for entry back to the United States. This lack of space will limit the Marine Corps ability to adhere to this tenet.

#### The Tenets of Focused Logistics

*Focused Logistics is the fusion of logistics information and transportation technologies for rapid crisis response, deployment and sustainment, the ability to track and shift units, equipment and supplies even while enroute, and delivery of tailored logistics packages and sustainment directly to the warfighter.*<sup>22</sup>

*Lieutenant General John J. Cusick  
Joint Staff Director for Logistics*

Next we will quickly compare the tenets of focused logistics as they affected the 15<sup>th</sup> MEU and the seizure of FOB Rhino. The first tenet is joint deployment and rapid distribution.<sup>23</sup> The seizure of FOB Rhino did not include the rapid deployment of Joint forces as the MEU was

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<sup>22</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Logistics Support in Joint Operations, Joint Pub 4-0 (Washington, DC: 6 April 2000), D-1.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., D-2.

already in theater on station along with SOF and units from the Air Force. However, the inability of the Army to quickly deploy for the security of the ISB in Jacobabad could have delayed the MEU's ability to pre-stage troops and their sustainment at this location. The second portion of this first tenet is accelerated delivery of logistic items through commercial sources or computer programs. This clearly was not the case. The theater logistics system was not established thus leaving the service components to support themselves to the best of their abilities. This led to a lack of quality support getting to the forces with the greatest need. The MEU took the lead by trying to establish a joint logistics system through their use of liaison officers at various ISB's.

The second tenet is information fusion.<sup>24</sup> To date, the military is not able to fully implement this tenet. We will not explore this, but it is enough to say that there are difficulties in getting logistics systems to talk intra-service let alone inter-service. Additionally, with the lack of presence of a JTF commander and staff, the MEU had no choice but to apply MEU logistics SOP's for all tracking and reporting. The MEU liaison officers provided reporting and tracking to both the MEU HQ and the ISB thus, by default, making this joint reporting.

Next is Force Health Protection.<sup>25</sup> The MEU did not receive any direction in this area from a higher command. However, the COCOM did quickly responded to the MEU's Request For Forces (RFF) for a surgical team to deploy into FOB Rhino. Health planning is difficult under normal circumstances. For this particular mission, the planning was exacerbated by the four hundred mile distance between the objective and the established medical support, that being the amphibious ships. The MEU attempted to establish a joint medical plan but initially was met

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<sup>24</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Logistics Support in Joint Operations, Joint Pub 4-0 (Washington, DC: 6 April 2000), D-2

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., D-3

with resistance by the other services.<sup>26</sup> However, over time the services stopped looking at health as a service requirement and started planning together to ensure that the support was available for any force that may be in need of it.

Multinational logistics is the next tenet for focused logistics.<sup>27</sup> This tenet is to ensure that joint forces make use of the logistics capabilities that other nations may have. The MEU quickly found that this type of operation could draw logistics capabilities from the countries involved. This mission drew the fast deploying SOF type of forces. As a result, the MEU was requested to support these nations with select sustainment. The largest difficulty was with fuel. Again the MEU found themselves negotiating support with units outside their direct command to ensure that all forces were provided with the needed support.

The fifth tenet is agile infrastructure, the proportionate sizing of the logistics footprint through proper planning for logistics personnel and bases.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately for the MEU, this tenet was not closely adhered to, as the speed of operations did not allow for deliberate planning. The operating area did not have a logistics system in place so each service established support bases as they saw fit. Initially, this was confusing but the MEU was able to locate the support bases and utilize them to the MEU's benefit. However, there was considerable redundancy in these support bases, which resulted in the slow down of the logistics pipeline. Also, because of the lack of direction, all inter-service support was based off handshakes and e-mails with liaison officers not directed from a higher unified command.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Major Mike E. Stroud, 15<sup>th</sup> MEU S-4, Personal account of the operation, 30 January 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Logistics Support of Joint Operations, Joint Pub 4-0 (Washington DC: 6 April 2000), D-3.

<sup>28</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Logistics Support of Joint Operations, Joint Pub 4-0 (Washington DC: 6 April 2000), D-3.

<sup>29</sup> Major Mikel E. Stroud, 15<sup>th</sup> MEU S-4, Personal account of the operation, 30 January 2003.

The last tenet of focused logistics is joint theater logistics management.<sup>30</sup> This is the integration of the logistics capabilities of all the forces in the operating area to assign common user support and sustainment. As we have just shown, because of the speed of this operation, the COCOM or his staff did not use this tenet. The units in the operating area did, however, work cooperatively to ensure all forces were supported. The MEU depended greatly on the Air Force's ISB in Jacobabad for several common user supplies throughout the mission at FOB Rhino. This included all bulk Class I (water) and some MRE's, some Class II and all Class III (A) and (W).

This quick comparison allows us to see that, although the mission at FOB Rhino used sea-based logistics, it was only one of many spokes in the logistics system that the MEU arranged to ensure that accurate support was getting to the forces. Additionally, during this comparison we have uncovered problems that need to be considered when trying to apply focused logistics. First there needs to be an operations area logistics plan in place as soon as the theater is opened up. The seabase should be part of that plan but not the entire plan. Seabased logistics can provide the commander flexibility when employed early, but then it should become only a portion of the overall logistics plan. Secondly, the JTF commander and his staff must provide guidance and influence the theater logistically as soon as possible. If this is not accomplished, the services will have no choice but to do it themselves and this will not lead to the most desirable or most efficient use of logistics.

#### Recommendations

*A sound logistics plan is the foundation upon which a war operation should be based. If the necessary minimum of logistics support cannot be given to*

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<sup>30</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Logistics Support of Joint Operations, Joint Pub 4-0 (Washington DC: 6 April 2000), D-3.

*the combatant forces involved, the operation may fail, or at best be only partially successful.*<sup>31</sup>

*Admiral Raymond A. Spruance  
Commander Fifth Fleet, 1946*

Although the Navy and Marine team offers flexibility to a commander and they are usually the first on a scene because of their forward-deployed status; they are relatively self-supporting for only short duration operations. The commander must guard against using this force as an entry capability and assuming that they will remain self-transportable and sustainable as long as they are needed. It is true that the commander should be able to expect his Navy and Marine Corps team to provide a forcible entry capability with a self-sustaining ability, it is not true that this is an infinite asset. By themselves the Navy and Marine Corps team will not be able to accomplish a mission like FOB Rhino. They will need help from the other services and the longer the LOC's, the more support that will be required. In order to ensure that this isolation does not occur, the JTF commander and his staff must promulgate guidance early in order to build a joint logistics system.

To build this joint logistics system, Joint Force commanders and their staff must standardize the services and establish a common logistics system for joint operations. This would allow the J-4 and the services to immediately establish a new theater of operations and build a joint logistics system that will support all the forces that need sustainment in order to carry out their assigned missions. In order to accomplish this, the Joint Forces must incorporate all the services transformational logistics concepts: velocity logistics, precision logistics, seabased logistics, and lean logistics and consolidate them for joint operations as focused logistics.

The incorporation of concepts would allow the J-4 to maneuver sustainment throughout the operating area. The J-4 would have several AirPorts of Debarkation (APOD) and several

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<sup>31</sup> Department of the Navy, Naval Logistics, Naval Doctrine Publication 4, (Washington, DC: 10 January 1995), 33.



SeaPorts of Debarkation (SPOD) and he has not had to create anything. This system allows him to utilize what the services have already provided. Additionally the J-4, by positioning himself at what the Navy terms the Advance Logistics Support Site (ALSS), can ensure that the commander's main effort is indeed the logistical focus of effort. He will also be able to direct the logistics into and out of the theater. Although I am not an advocate of extra levels of command, I do think that the J-4 should be carbon copied on all logistics requests within the JOA. This would have allowed the J-4 to prioritize the sustainment in the JOA and the MEU would not have found a warehouse stocked with extraneous items while imperative needs were not being met at the troop level. This would also allow the J-4 to redistribute sustainment intra-theater and reduce order ship time.

This joint theater logistics system concept should be built upon the strengths of the military services and their transformational logistics concepts. The foundation of this logistics system in an immature theater should be the Navy. The Navy is the most forward deployed of the services and has a superb logistics system in place throughout the world. The J-4 should capitalize on this system as he opens an immature theater of operations. The next logical service to overlay onto the Navy logistics would be the Marine Corps and their seabased logistics. The J-4 now has two services with internal logistics systems in place prior to the start of any contingency. However, to fully see the theater develop, the J-4 needs to establish several airfields for the deployment and sustainment of the Air Force and SOF. These services can deploy forces and sustainment quickly provided they have a benign airfield from which to operate. This will provide the baseline logistics system for the J-4 to expand upon in an immature theater.

As a contingency develops, the J-4 should deploy to the ALSS. This should be the base of logistics operations for the theater. In the 15<sup>th</sup> MEU operation, that would have been Bahrain (see Figure 2). The Navy will already be established at the ALSS to support their forward

deployed ships. This location will also be nearby a major Point of Debarkation (POD). The Navy will push logistics forward to what is termed a Forward Logistics Site (FLS).<sup>32</sup> This may or may not already be established by the Navy prior to the J-4 arriving in theater. Again, during the 15<sup>th</sup> MEU operation this was the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Marine Corps embarked on amphibious ships will then bring their unique ability to seabase into the theater and be able to immediately provide up to 15 days of sustainment for amphibious forces. This was the case as the MEU embarked on the Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) that was positioned off the coast of Pakistan. Then depending on the mission, the J-4 should next direct the timing and destination of SOF and Air Force units to airfields that will best facilitate the theater logistics system. During the 15<sup>th</sup> MEU's mission, SOF established two bases one in Oman and the other aboard a carrier. The Air Force expanded the ISB at Jacobabad.

The mere fact that the 15<sup>th</sup> MEU was able to accomplish this mission without an established joint logistics system may lead the COCOM and JTF commander to believe that seabased logistics can solely support this type of mission. That is not the complete truth of the matter. The other services of the Air Force, Army, and SOF all had a large hand in the logistics success that the Marines found at FOB Rhino. The JTF commander needs to ensure that his staff influences the JOA early to direct and supervise a sound logistical system in order that he will have fully visibility of sustainment as it moves into and out of his theater and thereby shaping the JOA.

Summary

*Victory is won or lost in battle, but all military history shows that adequate logistic support is essential to the winning of battles.*<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Department of the Navy, Naval Logistics, Naval Doctrine Publication 4 (Washington, DC: October 2002), 68.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., (Washington, DC: 10 January 1995), 74

*Dan A. Kimball*  
*Secretary of the Navy, 1952*

We have examined the logistics system in an immature theater of operation and have found that although as a military we are having success, logisticians could be providing faster and more efficient support. The Joint Forces need to be the driving organization to pull all the transformational logistics concepts of the services into one concept for services to use in joint operations. As we looked at the MEU's operation in Afghanistan, we saw that all the services involved could have greatly benefited from a common language and a common logistics system to orchestrate the logistics in the theater.

The charge is left in the hands of the Joint Forces as they finalize their concept of focused logistics to incorporate the best of the other services transformational concepts. This appears that it can easily be done by using the Navy's velocity logistics overlaid with the Marine Corps seabased logistics and the Air forces precision logistics to give a common logistics system for all forces operating in a joint operation. Only then will we have focused logistics.

Lastly, we examined the need to have a JTF commander and his staff in the theater as soon as possible. This allows for the J-4 to provide needed guidance to ensure that the commander's main effort is getting the support where it is needed. Additionally, with the United States fighting as a Coalition Force, the J-4 is able to provide unity of effort of all foreign forces and safeguard against the United States military bearing the entire logistical burden.

All services are developing transformational concepts and logistics is leading the way. The Joint Force staff must incorporate the service logistics concepts and merge them into their focused logistics concept that has four segments that can be easily applied to an immature theater of operations. I have tried to demonstrate how Joint Forces could incorporate the service concepts with relative ease. I have also applied the concepts to an operation in a difficult theater

of operations. We discovered that a focused joint logistics system could have been established and how the system could be build upon the service concepts. As we look back to the title of this paper we have discovered that while seabased and focused logistics had a major role in the success of this operation, joint logistics in Afghanistan was indeed a little of all three, seabased, focused, and miracle.

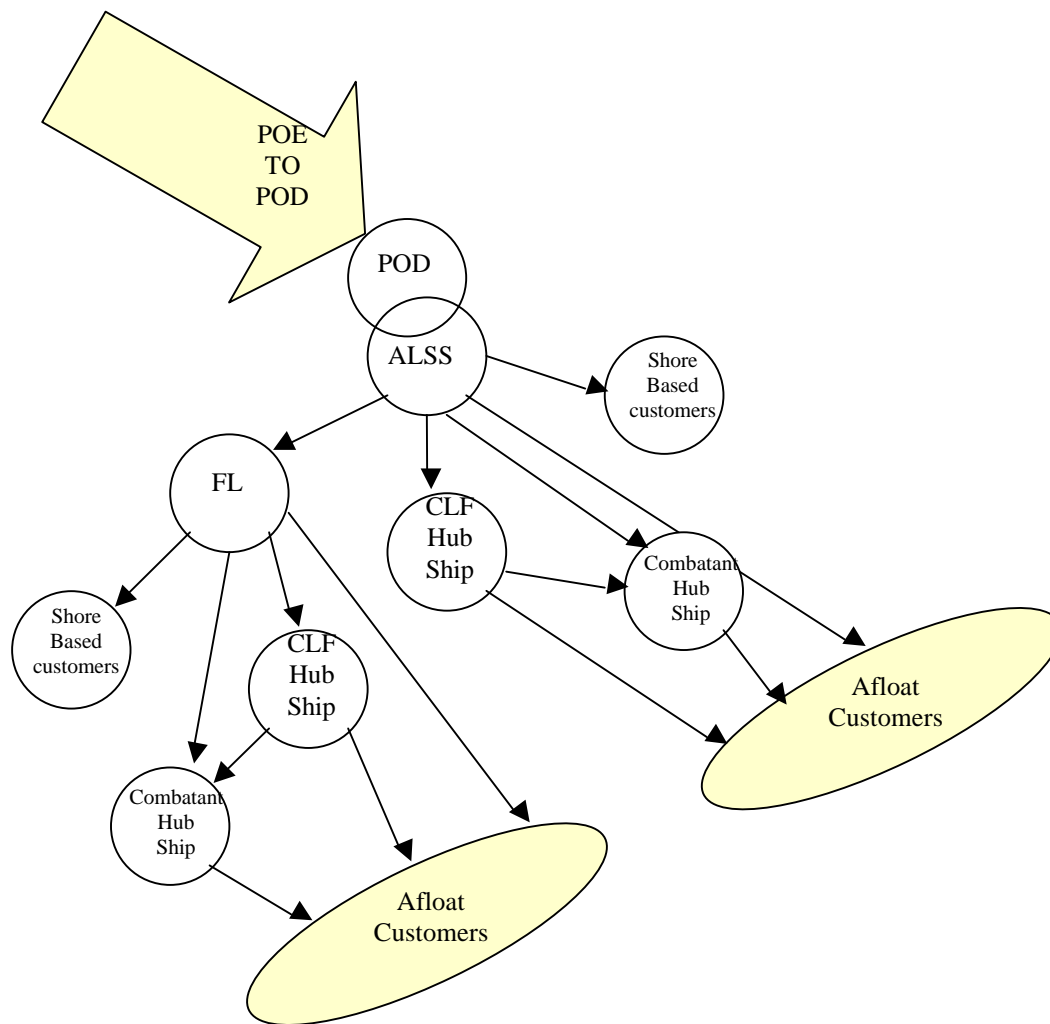


Figure 1 <sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Department of the Navy, Naval Logistics, Naval Doctrine Publication 4, (Washington,DC: October 2002), 68

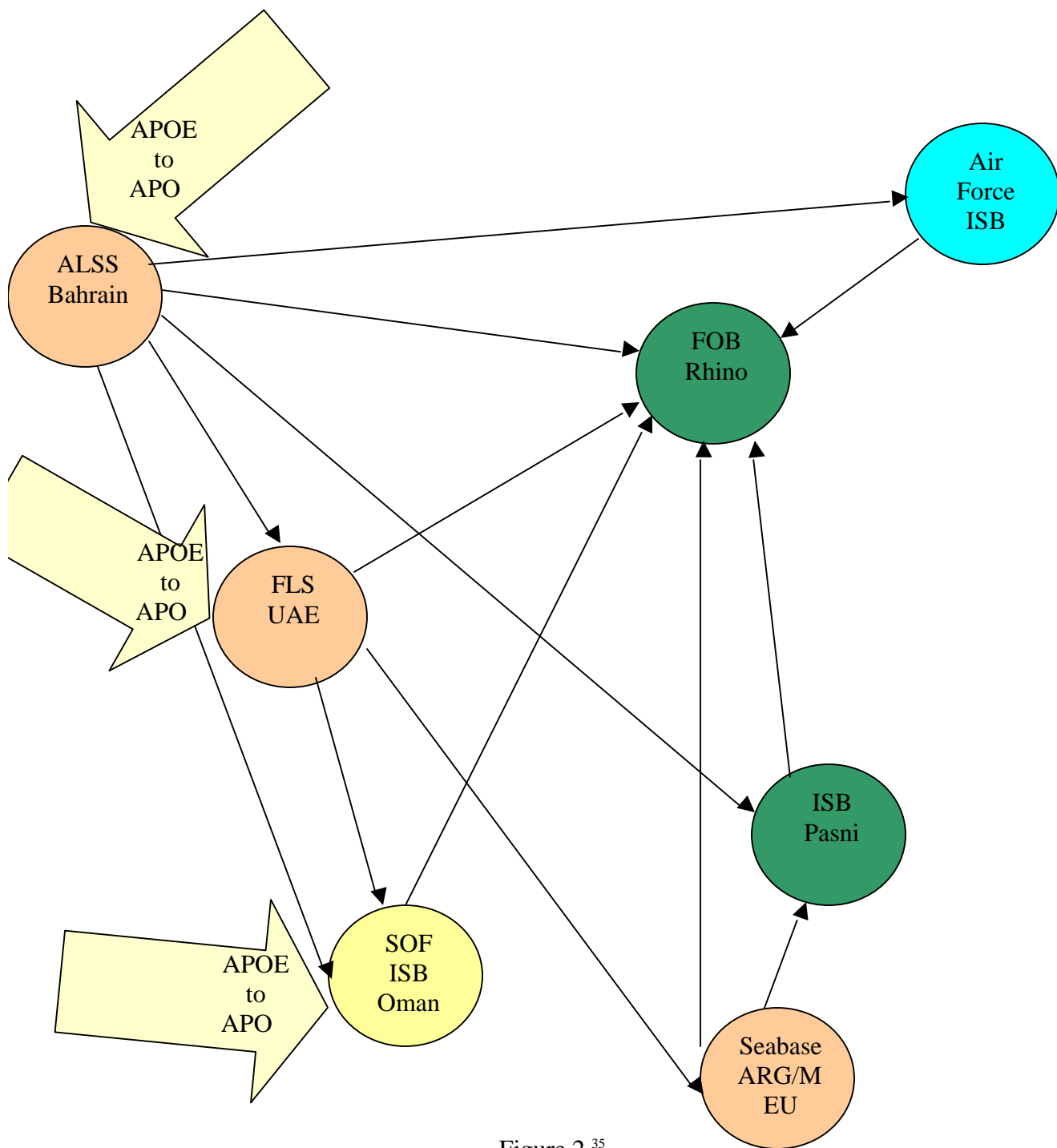


Figure 2 <sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Major Mike E. Stroud, 15th MEU S-4, Personal account of the operation. 30 January 2003.

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